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ABSTRACT

Security procedures for the New Jersey High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) are discussed and evaluated. All New Jersey high school students are required to pass the HSPT, which was administered for the first time in 1984. Generally, security plans are designed to limit access to test questions prior to test administration and to prevent intentional misrepresentations of the score information that is generated from a test administration. Originally, security for the HSPT was delegated to local officials. Little documentation was required for test administration, and almost no monitoring was performed. Rumors of test security problems, combined with the possibility of fears of state "take-over" of local school districts, eventually lead to a formal monitoring procedure. Trained observers discovered several security problems. An 18-point security plan has been developed and implemented. Eleven points deal with unauthorized access to test forms before, during, and after test administration, while the remaining seven points deal with alteration of input (answer sheets). The procedures focus on addressing problems related to staff actions in the school district, rather than on problems relating to actions by students. Preliminary indications are that the goal of tightening security and protecting the validity of tests will be met. (TJH)

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TEST SECURITY ISSUES FOR THE NEW JERSEY HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY TEST

by

Edward J. Masonis

Test security typically includes activities or procedures that are designed to enhance or protect the validity of the scores earned by individuals who take a test. Security procedures do not establish a test's validity, nor are they the primary source of that validity--that is determined by the test development process. Once a test is developed and its content or construct validity is established, however, measures must be taken to ensure that the scores earned from an administration of that test reflect what the test is intended to measure.

Security plans typically typically have two broad objectives; (1) to limit access to the test questions prior to a test administration; and, (2) to prevent intentional misrepresentations of the score information that is generated from a test administration. The first objective focuses on minimizing access to the test booklets and the the second focuses on minimizing the possibility that the answer sheets and the score reports will not be modified to ' misrepresent the students' achievement.

Minimizing access to the test questions prior to a test administration begins with tracking all materials provided to committee members during the test development process, protecting the security of the test materials while they are

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being printed, numbering the test booklets to facilitate tracking them while they are being handled, using secure procedures for delivering materials, using an inventory system to maintain a complete record of the disposition of each test booklet during a test administration, requiring the return of all test booklets after a test administration, and following up on instances where a test booklet is missing.

Equally important is the need to prevent misrepresentations of a person's scores on a test--misrepresentations that result from impersonations at a test administration, copying during a test administration, or changing the information that is included on a person's answer sheet or score report.

All high stakes testing programs must address test security, however, all such testing programs need not employ the same security procedures. So for example, for some nationally standardized tests where the examinees are not known by the staff at a test center, it may be necessary to employ such things as fingerprinting or the use of photo identification papers to combat impersonations, while for a high stakes test that is administered in a state by local school personnel who know the students being tested, such elaborate precautions may be unnecessary. It was with this perspective that the security procedures for the New Jersey High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) were developed and later modified.

THE ORIGINAL SECURITY SPECIFICATIONS

Beginning with the ninth-graders that entered a public high school in September 1985, all students are required to take and pass the HSPT; however, the test was administered for the first time in 1984 as a part of "due notice" testing. For the test administrations that were conducted each spring through 1987, all procedures for maintaining HSPT test security were delegated to personnel in the school districts. No numbering system was used to identify either test booklets or answer sheets, and since a new form of the test was administered each year using all new test questions, the booklets became public information after each administration. The expectation was that improprieties in testing would be handled at the local level, little documentation was required for the test administrations, and almost no formal monitoring was done. Individual instances of cheating by students were reported and some test scores were cancelled, but prescribed, detailed test security procedures were not considered necessary at this time.

This may have been the result of the following circumstances:

- o some security procedures were described in the instructions for administering the test;
- o initially, the students taking the test were a few years from graduation and so the test may not have been viewed as a serious threat to high school graduation by either faculty or students at the local

level;

- o the use of the test as an aid to instruction was emphasized, and since a new test form was released each year, the need for stringent security may not have been apparent.

Indications are that the administrations of the HSPT proceeded well during the first years of the program.

IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

As the first class that was required to take and pass the HSPT came nearer to its graduation date, and as the local districts acquired more experience with the test, rumors of security problems began to increase. In addition, because the State of New Jersey has "take-over" power it can exercise if school districts are judged not to be providing an adequate educational program for their students, and because a number of districts were threatened by a take-over, the HSPT results, which are used as one of the quality indicators in judging the districts, took on additional importance.

The HSPT administration that was conducted in April 1988 included plans for teams of trained staff to observe the test administrations to determine the extent to which the prescribed procedures were followed. This acitivity yielded information about a number of security problems that helped us flesh out specifications for enhancing the test security procedures for the HSPT.

The New Jersey experience probably mirrors that of other

states where high stakes tests are used, but perhaps with a flair that is unique to this state. For example, one incident involved a box of test booklets that mysteriously disappeared from the shipment that was sent to one district. The district denied ever having received the box, the delivery company insisted that the box was delivered, police were brought in, and newspapers carried headlines about the missing box. Like an abandoned child, the box was found on the steps of church across the street from the district offices several days later.

Another incident involved a student who took a test booklet from a teacher's desk and ran down the hall and out of the school. Again, police were brought in, a search was made, and news headlines were written. Unfortunately, this student was never caught and the test booklet was never recovered.

Other breaches in test security were discovered at the Spring 1988 administration of the HSPT, but these were less well publicized. They involved efforts by teaching staff to offer students access to the test questions before the test was administered, or efforts to assist students during testing. A decision was made to take action against those who were responsible for or who participated in discovered test security breaches. Steps were taken to suspend the professional license of those involved, as well as to encourage local boards of education to withold pay increments for these individuals.

A decision was also made to review the HSPT administration procedures to determine what changes were needed. These changes are described in this paper. A code of ethics for testing in the state was also developed. This effort was based on a similar effort in another state.

MODIFICATIONS TO HSPT TEST SECURITY

The review of HSPT test administration procedures uncovered a number of points where changes could be made. Following is a summary of common security problems and the procedures that are now in place to address these problems. The procedures that are new to the program since April 1988 are indicated by underlining.

PROBLEM	SECURITY PROCEDURES
unauthorized access to the test before, during, and after a test administration	1. The test is produced out-of-state. 2. Test development committee meetings are conducted in a controlled environment. 3. <u>Draft test materials are destroyed as confidential scrap.</u> 4. <u>All materials are delivered via a traceable system--signatures are required.</u> 5. <u>Test booklets and answer</u>

PROBLEM

SECURITY PROCEDURES

sheets are numbered.

6. A detailed inventory control system is used that requires recipients of secure materials to maintain a record of these materials at every point of transfer.
7. Students must use the same booklet for all three days of testing.
8. Answer folders must be returned for scoring via an overnight delivery service.
9. All test booklets and answer folders must be returned after testing--follow-up investigations are conducted if materials are missing.
10. Each of the three test sections is sealed on the three open sides.
11. Alternate forms of the test are developed for use in instances where a security breach is found.

PROBLEM	SECURITY PROCEDURES
altering input (answer sheets)	1. Procedures for administering the test, including monitoring student behavior and handling answer sheets, are specified in the test administrators' manuals. 2. Training for test administrators is conducted before each administration. 3. A number of testing sites are visited before, during, and after the test administration on an unannounced basis. 4. The period for conducting makeup administrations of the test is reduced from three weeks to one week. 5. Answer sheets are numbered and students may use only one answer sheet for all three days of testing. 6. Specifications are provided regarding the room set up at a testing site, as well as

PROBLEM	SECURITY PROCEDURES
	for distributing and collecting the test materials.
	7. Multiple essay topics are used at each test administration.

The security procedures listed above focus more heavily on addressing problems related to actions by staff in the school districts rather than on actions by students. There are two reasons for this. First, student misbehavior has been addressed at the local level with some reasonable success. School staff have demonstrated a willingness to flag inappropriate behavior by students and void their answer sheets when necessary. Second, most of the problems with test security in recent years have been the result of willfull attempts by teachers and administrators to assist students, or have been the result of negligent behavior. The problems resulting from staff actions are considered more serious because they affect whole test sites and could affect the entire test administration.

EPILOG

At this time, the impact of the state's experience with the new security arrangements is too limited to measure. Preliminary indications are that the goal of tightening security and protecting the validity of the tests will be

met, however, there are some ripple effects. One is that since more demands are being made on staff in the school districts, an increasing number of educators may hold the opinion that HSPT is more of an intrusion into the schools' instructional program than it was before. A second is that detailed reports including item response information can no longer be provided to schools. Since these reports have been provided since the first year the HSPT was administered, some school faculty may be troubled because they have come to value this information as a tool in curriculum planning.